

CHAPTER VII.

THE BROTHERS IN THE AMBULANCES OF PARIS.

"How great are thy works, O Lord!" Ps. ciii. 24.

The siege of Paris was foreseen. After the engagements at Chatillon, it became indispensably necessary to think of the creation of numerous ambulances: the hospitals would soon be insufficient to receive all the wounded.

Thenceforth, the ambulance service of the army of Paris comprised three distinct departments: the military ambulances, the ambulances of the International Society of Geneva, to which were attached the American ambulance, the Italian ambulance, etc., and the ambulance of the Press, which originated in individual and collective efforts of charity. These last, in connection with the minister of war, had their headquarters at the Tuileries.

On the line of investment, five posts at regular distances, composed of doctors and stretcher-carriers in sufficient numbers, and provided with the materials necessary for the first dressing of wounds, were in operation from the month of October. These posts were also furnished, for the removal of the sick and wounded, with temporary beds, and means of rapid and comfortable conveyance.

With the organization of these ambulances commenced, for the Brothers, that long campaign of devotedness which excited the admiration of all, and proved, once more, that

patriotism and religion, far from being incompatible, combine and harmonize admirably in the heart of man.

"It is absolutely necessary," said the committee of the Press ambulance, "to make an appeal to intelligent persons to care for the sick or wounded in our hospitals, to give them nourishment and medicine at proper times. The first care of the committee, unlike other relief societies, was to remove secular women from our wards and to keep them in the laundry; not that the woman of the world lacks the qualities necessary for the services required by the wounded, but because she brings with her the cares of her family and of her own private affairs, that she is surrounded by relations and friends who often seriously interfere with the discharge of her duty in relation to the sick.

"The religious, on the contrary, disengaged from all the cares of life, has but one thought and one end: it is that of realizing, in the most perfect manner possible, the ideal which fills her soul: devotion and sacrifice. For all these reasons, the Sisters were preferred to women of the world.

"To aid the Sisters, it was necessary to have male nurses, active, devoted, animated with the same sentiments as the Sisters, under whose direction they were to be placed. We, therefore, made an appeal to the Christian Brothers. We are happy to say they nobly responded to our call. Not only did from 250 to 300 Brothers accompany us to the battle-field, but 225 to 250 of them served as nurses or infirmarians; these, with the Sisters of Hope (*Sœurs de l'Espérance*), constituted a model hospital, and we can safely affirm that, whether in a moral or physical point of view, nowhere did the victims of the war receive greater care or attention than in our ambulance." Who can ever tell the sublime acts, the touching sacrifices of self-immolation, those kind religious accomplishments during the six months of the siege?

The Brothers gave up to the wounded their dormitories, refectories, study-halls, in fact, all the best apartments in their houses. In those spacious dwellings the air circulated freely; the beds were not crowded together as in the hospitals, the patients felt at home, and their religious attendants bent over their couches with the reverence and respect ever testified by the true disciples of Jesus Christ for those who suffer.

The Eastern Ambulance.

The Brothers first took care of the fatigued or wounded soldiers in the temporary establishment known as the "Ambulances of the Northern and Eastern Railroads." In the Eastern ambulance, established in the Brothers' house in the Faubourg St. Martin, under the patronage of Count de Flavigny, 1186 wounded soldiers received, from the 18th till the 26th of August, the chief care their state required.

Twenty-five Brothers were there employed. Some watched by night for the trains bringing in the soldiers. On the arrival of these trains, the religious were all at work helping to convey the wounded to their hospital, assisting the doctors to dress the wounds of those brought in, and giving, with tender care, the necessary remedies and refreshments.

From that provisional ambulance the wounded were next day transferred to the several hospitals of the city.

By the 14th of September, 1831 soldiers or mobiles had lodged in the ambulance. Of all these, there were none who showed themselves hostile to religious ideas. At meal-time these brave fellows were not ashamed to make the sign of the cross; it was plain it was something they had been accustomed to do from childhood. They were regular at their morning and evening prayers. Their crucifixes, scapulars

and medals were prized as only the truly pious can prize these precious reminders of God's mercy, and the loving care our Blessed Lady has for her clients. When shown to the chapel, they reverently knelt down in the holy place, and on leaving it, tearfully remarked: "Oh, how much better it is to be here than in the barracks!"

The thought of God was cheering and consoling to their heart. Many edifying instances of faith and piety and religious resignation were seen during those sad days in that ambulance of the Brothers in the Faubourg of St. Martin.

The Prussians were now advancing on Paris in three columns. Communications with outside points were cut off; the explosions which were heard in rapid succession gave sorrowful notice to the capital that, in a few hours, the last of the bridges would be destroyed and Paris encircled by a belt of fire.

The provisional ambulance at the railroad station could be of no further use, and was, therefore, to be broken up; but the Brothers, whose charity could not remain a single day inactive during the long months of the siege, thought of a purpose to which it might be put. On the 13th of September, the revered Brother Philippe, hearing it was in contemplation to form an ambulance for the employés of the railroad who might be wounded in defending the station and the company's property, wrote, offering the Brothers to take charge of it. The offer was thankfully accepted in a courteous letter from the director of the railroad companies.

The Ambulance of the Northern Dépôt.

The provisional ambulance of the Northern Dépôt was established on the 26th of August, and remained open till the 14th of September, the time of the investment. During the

first four days, it received 400 soldiers who had escaped from the disasters of Wissemburg, Sedan, etc.

From the 30th of August till the 5th of September, it received 594, without counting 1500 mobile guards from Champagne, to whom the Brothers gave refreshments. The gentleness and patience of those young soldiers were truly edifying.

A pleasing incident occurred to the Brothers. Two generals were the first to receive their charitable care. As the Brother Director was excusing himself to these superior officers for the poor accommodation they had for them, being obliged to give them soup from coarse, common bowls, one of the gentlemen graciously said: "It is true the vessel is a very common one, but one thing is very fine, Brother, as we all know well, although you may not be conscious of it; and that is, the care you Brothers have taken, and are taking, of our soldiers in the ambulance, and on the battle-field: it is *simply admirable!*"

We cannot refrain from recording a conversation between the Brother Director and a young soldier, a child of the South. Let not the enemies of Christianity be mistaken: through all the obstacles, the changes, the faults of time, there is a progress of Christian faith, of Christian strength, a progress which, though incomplete, is real and fruit-bearing, full of vitality and hope for the future.

"Where do you come from?" asked the Brother Director.

"From the department of the Gard."

"What do you wish to eat?"

"What the Church allows on days of abstinence."

"Well! you can eat meat; it is past midnight, and in Paris there is leave for meat on Saturday."

"But I don't belong to Paris, and meat is not allowed on

Saturday in my diocese. I will content myself with a piece of bread."

Directions were given to bring him some bread and wine. "No wine, if you please," said the soldier. "I never drink it. I mean to keep up the old custom now, so that I may have nothing to repent of in case the good God brings me safe home again."

"You are mad," said a lieutenant; "you are exhausted with fatigue. To-morrow you may have to fight; you must keep up your strength, so you had better take a glass of wine."

"Lieutenant," said the abstemious man, respectfully, "is a soldier to break his word? If you had promised to drink no wine, would you drink it? Besides, the not drinking it does me no harm; you see I enjoy excellent health, and am never sick."

It was useless to argue the question with this admirable soldier, who strikingly reproduced in his own person the type of the ancient Gauls. He was served with bread and water. Before taking this more than frugal repast, he stood straight up, and, before all present, soldiers, doctors, and Brothers, blessed himself and said his grace in a low voice, but with piety and recollection. He then sat down to his bread and water with the simplicity of ancient times. "My friend," said the Brother Director to him, "it is good not to have human respect, but it is also wise to avoid all affectation in our practices of piety. Could you not have said your grace in a way that would not attract so much attention?"

"Perhaps you are right, Brother; but, then, there are so many cowards now-a-days who don't want to do anything for God, that I have long made up my mind to practise my religion in public as well as in private. Every day I see

people who are not ashamed to do evil: why should I be ashamed to do my duty as a Christian? Our fathers knew not the weakness of our times. I have resolved to show myself a Christian wherever I am. So much the worse for others if they don't do the same. At the day of judgment they will be more to be pitied than I." The Brother was astonished to find in a common soldier such lofty ideas on the subject of religion. He took pleasure in eliciting his honest replies.

"You have been a soldier before?" resumed the Director.

"Yes, for seven years."

"Did you act then as you now do?"

"Precisely. God has always been good to me. I have not to reproach myself with being ungrateful to Him."

"Had you no taunts or sarcasms to endure from your comrades?"

"Some, at first: my blood used to rise. But my firmness soon brought it to an end. When they saw I was in earnest about serving God, they ceased to annoy me."

"Are you glad to be called out again?"

"One is always glad to serve his country. I should be a bad Frenchman if I complained of marching against the enemy."

"Are your father and mother living?"

"Alas! no, I lost them early; but I console myself by thinking that their pilgrimage is over, and that they see God in heaven."

"What do you do for a living?"

"I have been a servant thirteen years in the same family. They took me back at the end of my term of service, and when I was leaving them the last time, they told me my place would be ready for me when I returned."

"Are you not afraid of dying?"

"Afraid of dying! A Christian need not dread the end of his miseries. I do not run to seek death, but neither do I fear to meet it, for I believe in the immortality of the soul."

Much more could be told of this brave soldier, whose piety and intelligence were a delight to the Brothers, and whose example was worthy to be followed by all his comrades.

The Northern Railroad ambulance was divided into five apartments: a large kitchen, two refectories, and two dormitories; the larger of the latter for the soldiers, the smaller for the officers. Some camp beds were placed in a separate room for the Brothers, when their duty permitted them a little rest. The whole service was divided amongst the Brothers: some were occupied with the wounded; others had charge of the kitchen and refectory; and each one, in his own department, discharged his duty so admirably, that, while nearly 4000 soldiers were received in the ambulance, no complaint was ever heard.

They considered the Brothers as their true friends. The Turcos had a very particular respect for them, and often, when no one else could control their fierce temper, a look or word from one of the Brothers was sufficient to appease their anger.

Ambulance of the Legion of Honor (St. Denis).

At the news of the disasters of the army, and that the Prussians were marching on Paris, the ladies of the Legion of Honor sent their pupils home to their families, and took the necessary steps to form, in two of their magnificent halls, an ambulance of sixty to eighty beds. They requested the Very Reverend Brother Philippe to give them ten or twelve Brothers to act as nurses. Although the post was likely to

be one of considerable danger, the Brothers did not hesitate; on the 8th of September, the feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin, eighty of them set out for St. Denis, where they were to join four other Brothers who were teaching in the town.

At first, the Legion of Honor ambulance was under the direction of the lady superintendent, but, on the 17th of September, the military authorities took possession of the establishment, proposing to establish there an ambulance of five or six hundred beds, and which, in case of a battle in the neighborhood, might receive twelve or fifteen hundred wounded.

Thenceforward, the situation of the Brothers was very different: they became mere auxiliaries, without any definite charge, and were placed in a false and uncertain position. Actuated by charity alone, they surmounted all obstacles, complied with every requirement, and did all the good that the occasion permitted. With what eagerness they seconded the chaplains in their holy ministry! How joyfully they assisted at the services in the chapel of the establishment! How they loved to chant the praises of God under those arches which had re-echoed with the voices of so many illustrious religious in days gone by!

By the 20th of October, the number of wounded was so much reduced that the Brothers were permitted to return to their classes in Paris, and to serve in some of the city ambulances that were still in the care of the congregation. On leaving the Legion of Honor ambulance, they received the thanks of the physicians and directors, together with a written certificate of the services they had rendered there. The lady superintendent also wrote to express her high appreciation of their intelligent and devoted labors in that ambulance.

Ambulance of Passy.

In the month of August, the Brothers received, in their boarding-school at Passy, one hundred and fifty old men, previously lodged in the hospitals. They afterwards established an ambulance of one hundred and fifty beds, which were constantly occupied. Twelve hundred soldiers, attended by the Brothers alone, were cured in this ambulance of Passy. They cared for the souls as well as the bodies of their patients; it was the delight of the soldiers, as soon as they were able, to join them in their religious exercises in the chapel.

The community of Passy had the misfortune to lose, during the siege, one of its most promising members, Brother Agilée Léon, scarcely twenty-one years of age. This excellent young man, beloved by all, was as fervent a religious as he was a good teacher; he was the joy of his brethren, and the consolation of his esteemed Director. One day, from his bed of pain, he heard the cannon roaring more violently than usual. Reminded thus of the woes of his country, he slowly spoke these words: "My God, I offer thee my sickness, my sufferings, my life, for the deliverance of France." He died, calm and serene, on the 21st of December.

The St. Maurice Ambulance.

The Saint Maurice ambulance, founded in the Mother-house, under the patronage of the Duchess of Magenta, wife of Marshal McMahon, became from the outset one of the chief ambulances of the Press. There, as at Passy, the Brothers acted as infirmarians. In a few days they had a regular hospital service in full operation.

Before the battles fought around Paris, it was only fever patients that were received there; but, in consequence of

the influx of wounded, it became necessary to get up some eighty-five beds for the surgical department. "The thing was done in a twinkling," says Dr. Decaisne; "the eighty-five beds were immediately occupied, and, in a few hours, the Brothers had provided everything that was wanted, and were dressing the wounds of our brave soldiers just as if they had never done anything else. Nothing was wanting except a surgeon, when Providence, pitying the anxiety of the poor Brothers, sent them, just in time, a man whom we have all learned to love and admire, Ricord himself, first in skill as in goodness of heart. The illustrious practitioner did, in a few hours, all that was most urgently necessary, so that we were enabled to wait till next day for the surgeon appointed to take charge of the ambulance."

In that blessed house, till then consecrated to prayer and seclusion, the young and the old vied with each other in zeal and devotedness to make the poor wounded in some degree forget their suffering.

The venerable Superior-General, Brother Philippe, forgetting his fourscore years, himself attended the sick, consoling and strengthening them with a simplicity, genial kindness, and exquisite gentleness that captivated all hearts.

He received the wounded on their arrival, helped to carry them to their beds, and undress them. Every day he distributed some little delicacy among them, contriving all sorts of things to please them. He rejoiced when rewards were granted to his dear wounded.* He, so austere and so forgetful of self, feared not to recommend to the authorities those of his patients who had distinguished themselves on the battle-field. He publicly honored them before their

* Three crosses of Honor and several medals were awarded to the wounded of Oudinot street.

comrades. He got up a little festival after each distribution of rewards. When he appeared in the wards, every face beamed with joy. He stopped at every bed, and had a kind, loving word for each patient. He propagated the Catholic faith by means of charity, presenting in his own venerable person the true type of the Divine Comforter, Jesus Christ.

And when the wounded, whom he had received with affectionate cordiality, were cured and about to leave, he had for each some words of encouragement, and a fatherly blessing. He pointed out the line of duty, and planted in the hearts of all the germs of those deeds that make illustrious citizens.

The 1st of January was a solemn day in the Oudinot street ambulance. After Mass, all the soldiers who were able to rise, assembled in the grand hall of the house. There a sergeant-major of the Côte d'Or mobiles, decorated for his gallant conduct at Champigny, in the name of all the patients of the ambulance read to Brother Philippe an address expressive of their admiration for his unbounded charity, and their gratitude for the many favors they had received at his hands and the hands of all the Brothers.

At its conclusion, Brother Philippe, in his gentle, endearing way, thanked them for their expressions of kindness and good will.

Count Sérurier, vice-president of the Relief Society, and delegate of the minister of war and of the navy, wrote to Brother Philippe wishing him, his worthy assistant, and all the Brothers of Oudinot street, a happy New Year. In common with all France, he was penetrated with admiration, veneration and gratitude for the example of patriotism and abnegation which the Institute was giving in the trials and afflictions of their country. The charity of the Brothers

of Oudinot street did not confine itself within the walls of their own house; it extended to all the misfortunes of the capital. On the last days of December, Brother Philippe sent to M. Arnaud (of Ariège) a piece of black cloth to make clothing for the poor of the seventh ward. "I return you thanks," wrote the mayor to the venerable Superior, "for the piece of excellent cloth you have sent us for the poor of our ward. We are the more indebted to you that you are covering them with your own garments."

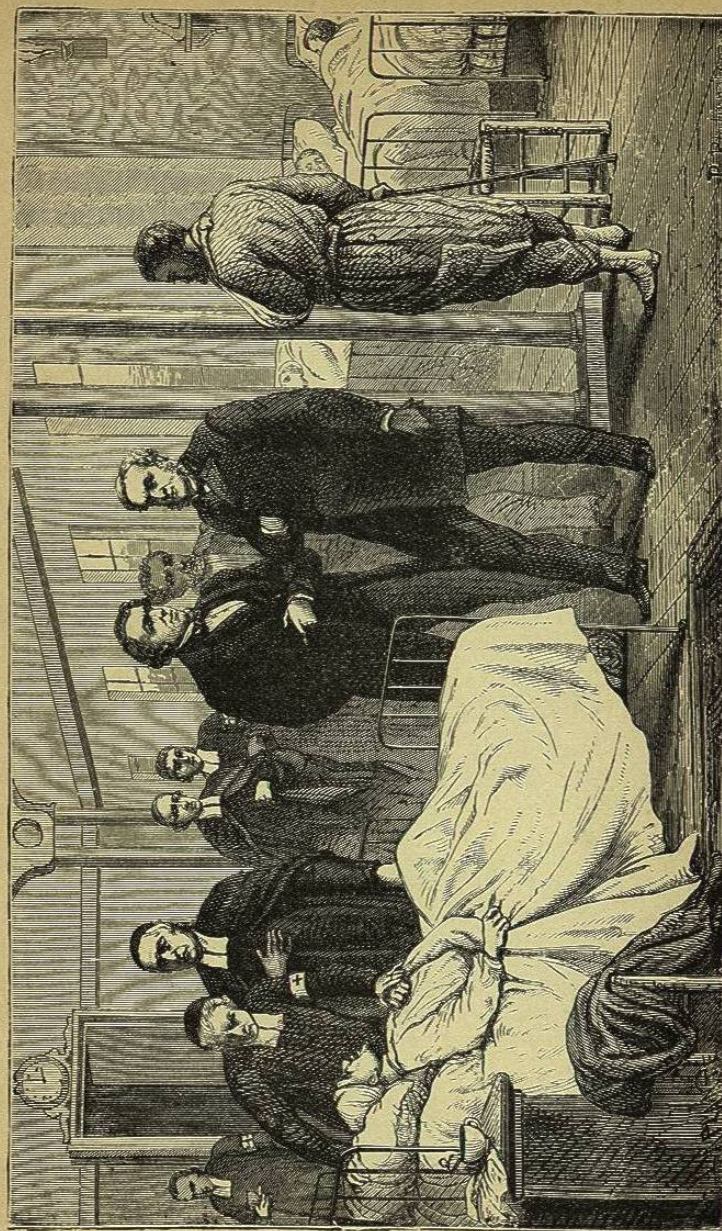
On the 12th of January, desirous of contributing as far as he could towards the purchase of woollen clothing for the army of Paris, Brother Philippe sent M. Arnaud a cheque for 1000 francs for that object. This generous donation was acknowledged by letters of thanks from the magistrate of the district, and from the Relief Society.

On the 18th of January, Brother Philippe sent a similar sum for the relief of the seventh ward. The charity of the Brothers grew with the miseries of the people.

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During the Commune, the committee of the Press ambulance kept up two services in the St. Maurice ambulance, one of medicine, and one of surgery.

In the last days of the struggle, the pavilions at Longchamps, involved in a network of barricades, and threatened by the bombs and shells from Mont Valerien, had to be evacuated. M. Cotte, director of the Longchamps ambulance, demanded of the authorities the Mother-house of the Brothers in Oudinot street. On the 19th and 20th of May, M. Demarquay installed there his different services and an immense quantity of ambulance stores, with a view to prevent their being taken by the Federals. The very same evening,



DOCTORS RICORD AND DEMARQUAY IN CONSULTATION.